

PLATTERS

In the not too distant future musak will no longer exist.

**ELTON JOHN:
Rock Of The
Westies (DJM)**

FACT: Elton John is one of the nicest people ever to touch ground while walking.

Fact: This notwithstanding, the aforementioned Elton has been making an awful lot of records recently.

Opinion: The last couple have shown severe signs of strain, and "Rock Of The Westies", which will undoubtedly be number one in every available chart by the time you've turned round three times and counted to a hundred, is so rickety it'd collapse if you breathed heavy on it.

Cards on the table: as far as the present writer is concerned, E.J.'s best and most vital period was the stretch between "Honky Chateau" and "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road", the middle phase of his career which marked his effective relaunch with the addition of Davey Johnstone to his touring band and the ditching of Paul Buckmaster and his Instant Redd-Wip string arrangements before he fell victim to the Product Mill (from "Caribou" onwards).

"Caribou" had "product" stamped all over it: it came on thin and forced, with only "The Bitch Is Back" displaying the full tilt rock and roll naivete that has characterised most of Elton's best work.

"Captain Fantastic" seemed like an album that Elton actually deeply wanted to make; it was somewhat excruciating to listen to, but what the hell, if Elton wanted to do a Plastic Ono album we could just about forgive them if they followed it up with something funky and unselfconscious.

Which they haven't.

"Rock Of The Westies" may not be the worst album Elton has ever made (even discounting his debut album "Empty Sky", there's still "Madman Across The Water" to take into account), but, taking into consideration the stage of his career at which it impinges upon our consciousness, it's undoubtedly the most disappointing.

Fact by fact, it faileth to measure up.

First of all, the vocals.

E. J. has often (and unfairly, I might add) been accused of mannered and affected singing

in the past, but here he descends into the realms of pure self-caricature that it's almost painful to listen to.

Particularly on the opening cut, "Medley (Yell Help, Wednesday Night, Ugly)" and the otherwise tolerable "Grow Some Funk Of Your Own", he sounds like a bar-room drunk doing an Elton John impression through a mouthful of live gold fish.

That characteristic melismatic phrasing is exaggerated to almost embarrassing proportions, and he's affected a quite ludicrous Rod Stewart rasp that don't do *no-body* no good.

SECONDLY, THE songs.

Generally speaking, the melodies are okay; standard E.J. progressions, though he hasn't come up with anything to compete with his accepted classics: there isn't a rock and roll tune to compare with "Saturday Night's All Right For Fighting", "Crocodile Rock" or "The Bitch Is Back", or a slow song in the same league as "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road", "Your Song", "Daniel", "Rocket Man" or "Tiny Dancer".

The main culprit is Bernie Taupin, who seems incapable at this juncture of writing convincingly about anything.

"Island Girl", an otherwise remarkably catchy and pleasant little tune about a Jamaican hooker in New York, has such outright racist lyrics that they'd be incredibly offensive if it wasn't for the fact they're too dumb to be taken seriously.

Likewise, "Street Kids", set to what is apparently an attempt to hit a groove halfway between the Stones' "Sympathy For The Devil" and Bowie's "Panic In Detroit" throws around so many hand-me-down punk clichés and so much pseudo-sociological profundity that you're inescapably drawn to one of two conclusions: either Taupin is (again?) attempting to parody the likes of Bruce Springsteen or else he's so out of touch with what actually goes down on the street that he thinks it's actually like that.

Either way, it's pitiful.

Just as Elton is beginning more and more to allude to styles without showing any real understanding of their dynamics, so Taupin is equally unable to approach any subject without shielding himself with clichés.

As if "Island Girl" and

"Street Kids" weren't bad enough, "Grow Some Funk Of Your Own" depicts a real "Ey, greengo, take yore steenkin' hands offa mi tacos ai yi yi" view of Mexico.

Thirdly, the production. Most of the way through, the band sound to be really cooking; Caleb Quaye and Davey Johnstone on guitars wail pretty good on almost every track, but Gus Dudgeon has supplied such a mellow, smooth, well-rounded mix that even when one of them is really laying it down it doesn't cut through.

Listen closely to "Street Kids" — Caleb's definitely cutting loose, but it's like he was phoning the solo in from the bar downstairs. Likewise Labelle's guest shot doing back-up vocals on "Medley"; they're reduced to sounding like any competent spadechick trio.

KUDOS, incidentally, to Elton's new band, all of whom carry themselves like officers and gentlemen throughout.

Davey Johnstone hasn't played better guitar since "Have Mercy On The Criminal" on the "Don't Shoot Me I'm Only The Piano Player" album (which is high praise; dig that album out and listen to it again) and everybody's playing superbly, including E.J. himself.

But, unfortunately, "Rock Of The Westies" sounds like it was made to meet a quota; just another Elton John album.

Which is cool; lotsa people like Elton John albums. I've been known to dig a few of 'em myself, and hopefully I will again. But this one epitomises all of Elton John's faults and precious few of his virtues; it simply don't do the man justice. Nevertheless, it'll be a smash. I just wish Elton wouldn't sound as though he's selling tape by the mile.

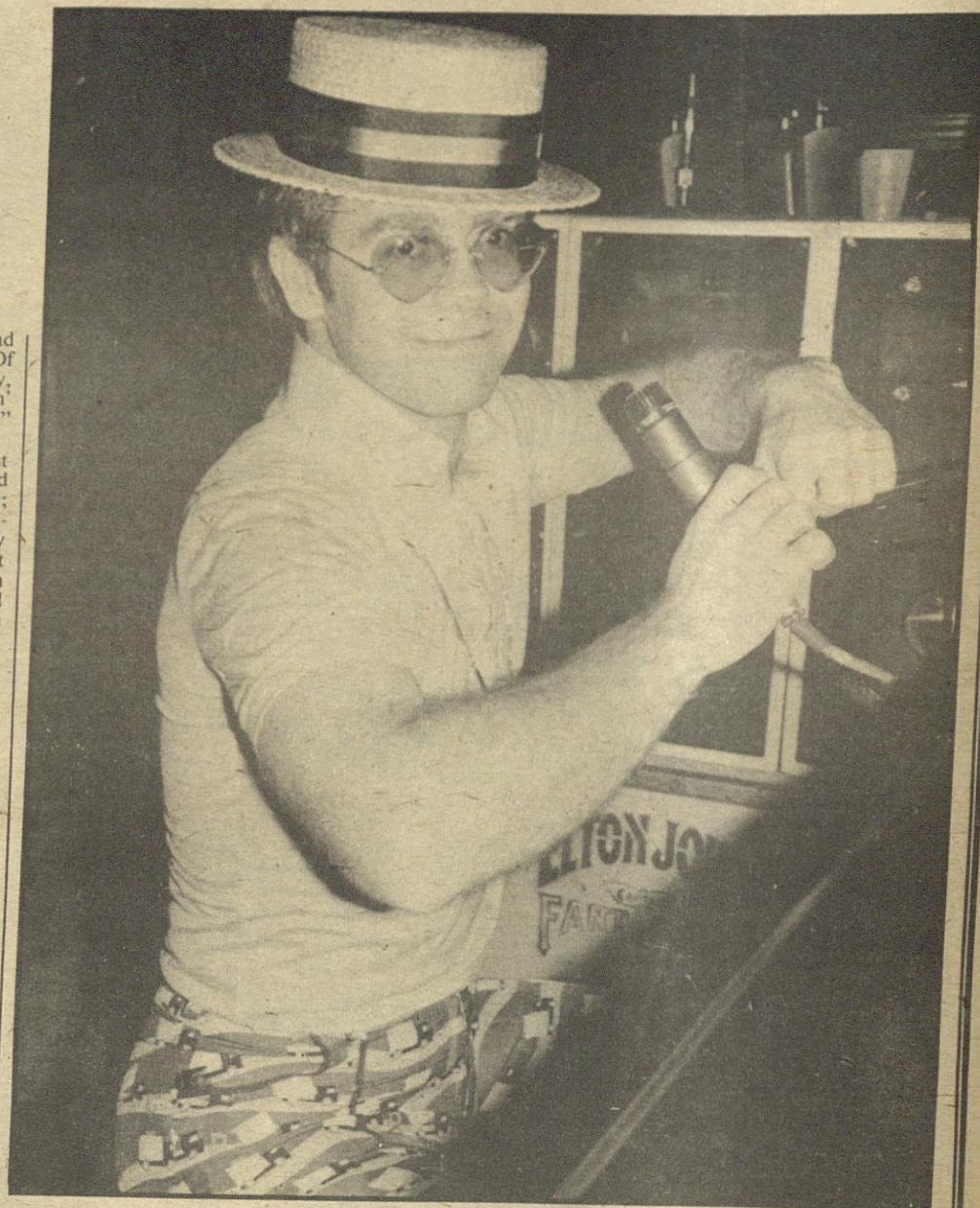
Charles Shaar Murray

GEOFF MULDAUR: Is Having A Wonderful Time (Warner Brothers)

IN TERMS of both the excellence of the individual performances and the tastefulness of the arrangements, Geoff Muldaur's debut solo album closely approximates to the current approach taken by his ex-missus, Maria (who figures here).

They also have axeman celebre Amos Garrett in common.

Despite this — and the



There will, however, be Elton John tapes sold by the mile.

presence of choice session folks like Cornell Dupree and Bernard Purdie (guitars and drums respectively) — and also the fact that Geoff is a better singer than Maria — he presents himself as a far less personable figure.

The album's title may hold the key: i.e. that while the author may be having fun with his favourite material, favourite producer (Joe Boyd) and favourite musicians he is presenting himself with his back to his audience.

A simple case of age-old

musicianly snobbery which holds that you do just what you like and if anybody else digs it well that's nice but purely coincidental.

Thus, while individually some of the songs may ostensibly be quite attractive, overall the range of material Muldaur covers only serves to fragment the continuity of the album.

Whilst it is laudable for an essentially unknown artist to attempt to break established rules for "commercial appeal", he should also have the sensitivity

to attempt some kind of happy medium.

To be specific, I find it hard to digest a sense of priorities that has an extended quasi film score — "I Want To Be A Sailor" — covering over half the first side. Despite the fact that it is alleviated a little by an extremely artfully executed blues postscript featuring both Garrett and Dupree, with fine piano work from Muldaur himself.

Muldaur cannot expect his audience to bridge the vacuum between the above and the opener on the second side, a revamped big band arrangement of the Jackie Wilson hit "Higher And Higher". John Cale (on viola) and the excellent black bassist Gerald Jemmot both appear in the credits but this new arrangement adds nothing to the original; just another case of artistry for its own sake.

The remainder is harshly purist stuff performed with the same pristine (prissy?) tastefulness — Merle Saunders' "Wondering Why", Walter Vinson's jug-band relic, "Jailbird Love Song" — with Maria on fiddle — Huey "Piano" Smith's "High Blood Pressure" and Bobby Charles' "Tennessee Blues" with Richard Thompson on lead guitar.

The irony of "Is Having A Wonderful Time" is that Muldaur probably figured that by taking his music-for-art's-sake approach he'd be performing sans ego; i.e. by pretending that commerciality is of no importance.

Instead his *modus operandi* has backfired on him — in behaving like a good old fashioned ethnic snob he has become the ultimate egoist.

Fred Dellar

Pete Erskine

IMPORTS

THE NEWS for West Coast enthusiasts is that there's a new Quicksilver Messenger Service around.

Seems that John Cipollina, Greg Elmore, Dave Freiberg, Gary Duncan and Dino Valente recently got together again to cut ten fresh originals under the guidance of producer John Palladino, the result being "Solid Silver" (Capitol), an album which includes contributions from keyboardman Nicky Hopkins, himself once a Quicksilver member, and Kathi McDonald, whose own "Insane Asylum" still remains unissued in this country.

Incidentally, I hear that another QMS anthology of stuff from 1967/71 is scheduled by our local branch of EMI — just the sort of thing I like to hear.

Trip: the label responsible for the reissue of so many oldie-but-goody rock items, has done a remarkable job of reissuing many of the neglected Mer-

cury/Emarcy jazz items recently — albums like Clifford Brown and Max Roach's magnificent "Jordu," Al Cohn and Zoot Sims' "You and Me" and the Benny Carter-Willie Smith-Pete Brown "Alto Artistry."

But even more welcome have been the sides featuring the work of the late, great Dinah Washington — such as "Jam Session," where she appears in the company of Clark Terry; Clifford Brown, Junior Mance and a host of other talented jazzers, or "Dinah Washington Sings Bessie Smith," on which she's backed by a small band led by Eddie Chamblee, a booting tenorman who, like Dinah herself, matriculated from Lionel Hampton's blockbustin' R. & B. big band.

When Dinah was around she was known as The Queen, and royalty she was, for after Billie Holiday's death there was no one who could surpass her aptitude for bringing a touch of gospel and blues to even the most trite of songs.

*Best of
Cockney
Rebel?
So soon?*

Sadly though she was to survive Lady Day by only four years and she died, age 39, on December 14, 1963, after a combination of barbituates and alcohol caused her heart to give out.

Today she lives on thanks to the uncanny vocal resemblance of Esther Phillips — so if you dig Esther, something which ought to be compulsory, then lend an ear, and hear where

she's really coming from.

Meanwhile, American EMI have released a kind of Best Of Cockney Rebel. Titled "A Closer Look," it features the following tracks — "Make Me Smile," "Mr. Raffles," "Panorama," "Hideaway," "Sebastian," "Sweet Dreams," "Psycomodo," "Mr. Soft," "Mirror Freak" and "Tumbling Down."

Also being shipped in right now are a couple of Motown items. The first is "Movin' On" (Motown), another slice of disco-mania from The Commodores, while "Wings Of Love" (Gordy) is the latest use of plastics by The Temptations.

Also on the Motown front, one wholesaler tells me that he's ordered a Stevie Wonder double-album, which should be in the racks within a couple of weeks. But at the time of writing there's no information as to whether the album contains all new material or whether it's merely the Anthology that was promised some time back. But

whatever it is, it's on the way.

Meanwhile, here's the latest list of goodies due in at your local import bazaar: Jerry Jeff Walker "Ridin' High" (MCA); Noel Redding "Clonakilty Cowboys" (RCA); Delaney Bramlett "Giving Birth To The Song"; Hot Tuna "Yellow Fever" (Grun); Ozark Mountain Daredevils "Car Over The Lake" (A. & M.); Three Image "Inside The Triangle" (Manticore); Zulema "R.S.V.P." (RCA); Gabor Szabo "Macho" (Salvation); Osmonds "Around The World Alive" (MGM double-album); Jerry Reed "Red Hot Picker" (RCA); Ronnie Milsap "Night Things" (RCA); Merry Clayton "Keep Your Eye On The Sparrow" (Ode); Magma "Live" (RCA Double); Stanley Turrentine "Have You Ever Seen The Rain?" (Fantasy); Del Shannon "Vintage Years" (Sire Double); and Joe South "Midnight Rainbow" (Island).